sector. India is the 17th largest maritime country of the world. What is the shortage strength? It is only 834 officers in the officers' cadre. Whereas there are 55,000 ratings, 27,000 officers; the shortage we expect is only 834 in this year. I do not think there is any acute shortage. At the same time, it is a problem and it will be addressed as quickly as possible.

SHRI PRAVEEN RASHTRAPAL: Mr. Chairman, Sir, I support the demand of my colleague, Shri Janardhana Poojary for Karnataka. At the same time, Gujarat has a typical problem and I come from Gujarat. We manufacture salt. But the office of the Salt Commissioner is in Rajasthan. Today, I inform the hon. Minister that the longest coastal area in India is in Gujarat. According to my information, and the answer given in the Parliament itself, Gujarat has got 1200 kms. of coast area and the next State may be Kerala and the third may be Maharashtra. But, there is no college of oceanography in Gujarat and there is no institute of marine technology in Gujarat. And, we are demanding this for the last many years. I request the hon. Minister to consider the place Bhavnagar where the then Maharaja had also offered the Chanch Bungalow, which has got 80 rooms, if a marine institute is located in Gujarat. So, I request the hon. Minister to let this House know whether the request of Gujarat for a marine technology institute will be considered or not.

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Sir, this can be examined.

SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA: Sir, recently we have been seeing in newspapers that there was a lot of trouble going on in the State Government and that is entirely due to the Mining Ministry and the Urban Development Ministry of the State. Has this political trouble for the last few years in the State affected adversely in this kind of projects?

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Sir, I cannot answer this because I could not understand this question. (*Interruptions*)

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Minister has expressed his inability to answer that question, let the next supplementary be asked.

SHRI A. VIJAYARAGHAVAN: Sir, in his reply, the Minister told that there is a shortage of only 800 technicians. Actually the situation is, thousands of experts trained in this particular area, after getting sufficient training and expertise, are migrating to outside India. So, there is an acute shortage the country is going to face in the near future. So, a comprehensive programme is needed. Does this Ministry have any such programme? The situation is worse.

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Sir, as I have already said, there is no acute shortage. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI JANARDHANA POOJARY: Sir, I am in the Standing Committee and the officers have admitted that there is an acute shortage. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Sir, I have collected information from INSA only. INSA is the proper organisation and they have informed that there are only 834 officers' shortage.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Question Hour is over.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO STARRED QUESTIONS

Telephone facilities in rural areas

*202. SHRI N.R. GOVINDARAJAR: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the revolution in telephones has not reached the rural areas in the country;

inspite of the vast development in Information Technology;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether the private telephone operators and even BSNL have failed to achieve the target for providing telephone facilities in rural areas in the country; and

(d) if so, the specific steps taken by Government to take the telephone revolution to the rural areas in the country?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI A. RAJA): (a) and (b) Government is making all out efforts to provide telephones in rural areas of the country. As on 30th September, 2007, the total number of rural telephone connections comes to 586.76 lakh resulting in a teledensity of 7.30 as against a teledensity target of 4 by 2010.

(c) All the Basic Private Service Operators (BPSOs), who were issued license in 1997, have migrated to Unified Access Service License (UASL) in November, 2003. According to the guidelines of UASL, there is no requirement of mandatory coverage of rural areas under the migrated UASL License.

(d) Various steps being taken to take the telephone revolution to the rural areas of the country include *inter alia*:—

(i) Laying of cable upto 5 Kms. of exchange by BSNL against the earlier standard of 2.5 Kms. Based on demand and techno-commercial consideration.

(ii) Deployment of Wireless in Local Loop (WLL) network in rural areas to meet the demand of scattered and far-flung rural areas where connection of telephone is not techno-commercially feasible on landline.

(iii) Coverage of Remote and far-flung areas, which are not possible to be covered with terrestrial technology, with Digital Satellite Phone Terminals (DSPTs).

(iv) Provision of subsidy, through Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) in the first phase for setting up and managing 7871 number of infrastructure sites (towers) in 500 districts spread over 27 States for provision of mobile services in the spcified rural and remote areas, where there is no existing fixed wireless or mobile coverage.

Post offices in NER

*204. SHRI O.T. LEPCHA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) the number of post offices functioning at present in the rural areas of North-Eastern Region (NER), particularly in Sikkim, district-wise;

(b) the number of villages in the States in NER where post office facility has not been provided as yet; and

(c) the details of measures taken by Government to open new post offices in such villages of NER?